

The International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies (**IFIMES**) in Ljubljana, Slovenia, regularly analyses events in the Middle East and the Balkans. IFIMES has prepared an analysis of the current political situation in Albania which has entered the final part of the campaign for the forthcoming **parliamentary elections scheduled for 28 June 2009**. The most relevant and interesting sections from the comprehensive analysis entitled “**Election campaign with the taste of blood**” are given below.

## **ALBANIA AND 2009 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS:**

### **ELECTION CAMPAIGN WITH THE TASTE OF BLOOD**

#### **POLITICAL RADICALISATION**

Unlike the beginning of the election campaign when different signals were sent, the final part of the campaign has become r aggressive. The two main protagonists, Sali Berisha (Democratic Party - PD) and Edi Rama (Socialist Party - PS), reduced their duels to the level of personal insults. The tensions led to the assassination of a Democratic Party activist in a village near Kavaja, but the situation was soon put under control in order to avoid further clashes between the two political parties.

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Despite the political benefits of the assassination for the Democratic Party the reactions were reduced to the level of verbal conflicts which paved the way for potential political radicalisation. Severe verbal conflicts and accusations have marked all public meetings and television debates in recent days, diverting attention from the essential problems present in the Albanian society.

Despite the attempts to appease the situation another political assassination was carried out in north Albania where the Albanian Christian Democratic Party leader for the Skadar region Aleks Keka was killed in a car explosion. His party, a former Berisha's coalition partner, accused the Democratic Party and the speaker of the Albanian parliament Jozefina Topalli of being directly involved in this political assassination.

#### **TWO STRONGEST PARTIES LACK OPTIMISM FOR THE CAMPAIGN**

Both major political parties entered the election campaign with a strong financial and media support, incomparable to other parties, which represents an obvious advantage. However, they did not use this advantage to bring the spirit of optimism

to the citizens and restore their trust by persuading them that they would be able to ensure economic development during the next four years. The issue of economy was not represented enough in the vocabulary of political representatives and leaders of main political parties. Their political vocabulary contains mostly the militant spirit, accusations about corruption related to public tenders and building permits and unjustified discrediting of political opponents, which creates the possibilities for a very tense atmosphere. Television debates where parties are confronted have turned into a political arena where unscrupulous insults have exceeded the limits and ethics of public communication, sending a very bad message to the public and the voters. The two strongest political parties, Democratic Party and Socialist Party, have been openly violating democratic rules, which has prevented other political parties to present their position and programmes.

### **THE SOCIALISTS ARE SAVING WHAT CAN STILL BE SAVED**

Three renowned companies – Zogby International, Gani Bobi and IPR Marketing – in cooperation with the major television houses in Albania – Top Channel, Klan and ORA News – carried out several surveys which all show that Democratic Party will win the elections but will not have enough seats in the Parliament to form the government and run Albania for the next four years.

The IFIMES International Institute is closely monitoring Democratic Party's campaign and believes that it will win the elections, while the Socialist Party is trying to save what can still be saved in the final part of the election campaign.

Most Albanian analysis think that Democratic Party's strategy and campaign differ quite a lot from what was expected. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of Democratic Party's campaign will have to be carried out after the elections. The fact is that during more than one year of campaigning the Socialist Party has worn out its political vocabulary and is experiencing fatigue the end of the campaign, lacking the inventiveness in attracting potential voters.

Socialist Party's pre-election slogan "New politics and old politics" is focused on the personality of PS president Edi Rama and does not guarantee best election results. Moreover, confrontation with other left-wing political parties has turned out to be to the detriment of the Socialist Party.

### **LSI AND PSV91 ARE UNDOUBTEDLY THE KEY TO FORMING THE NEW GOVERNMENT**

All surveys have confirmed that the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) and PSV91 are the key to forming the new government coalition. Although the Democratic

Party is ranking highest, as was described in our last analysis (read more at <http://www.ifimes.org/default.cfm?Jezik=En&Kat=10&ID=467>), the block of left parties will have the power to form the new government, whereby the parties united in the Socialist Alliance for Integration will play an important role. This situation has created tensions in the Socialist Party whose intention at the beginning of the election campaign was to dominate and to eliminate other political parties in the left-wing block. On this basis the Socialist Party's campaign strategy was built, but it did not bring the desired effects. The left voters, having recognised Socialist Party's strategy, are now more attentive to a balanced power and control among individual political parties.

Both major political parties are openly calling to the citizens not to give their votes outside these two coalitions nor outside their respective party, thus openly violating pre-election rules. For example, speaker of the Albanian parliament Jozefina Topalli called the voters to vote only for the Democratic Party and not for its loyal ally in the government, the Republican Party, whose president and former minister of defence Fatmir Mediu resigned as minister after the "Grdec" case. Moreover, Topalli made some very serious accusations against the Republican Party members, calling them spies and mercenaries. President of the Socialist Party Edi Rama reacted in a similar way, which shows that this political practice will seriously threaten future democratic development of Albania. .

### **THE US SHOW NO SYMPATHY WITH BERISHA AND RAMA**

The election campaign in Albania has shown that the two main political parties lack new motives and inspirations. In 2005 elections fight against corruption was the main pillar of the Democratic Party. Today, fight against corruption seems to be a very distant issue for both political parties. Both PD and PS have no special motive for fighting corruption. The public no longer believes that they were fighting a true and determined fight against corruption. Although some serious accusations were made, there is no clear and efficient platform for fighting corruption and organised crime which are very dangerous for the Albanian society. Even Sali Berisha, who was regarded in 2005 as a politician determined to regulate this area, has lost his credibility after his own children were accused of being involved in corruption and criminal activities. However, his political opponent Edi Rama did no better, as he was accused of abusing his position as Mayor of Tirana when he issued building permits without any legal basis.

This is one of the reasons why the US are showing no sympathy with the incumbent political establishment of Sali Berisha, but obviously they are not showing any sympathy with the opposition Socialist Party either. It seems that Edi Rama does not like to be seen in western states capitals and neither does Berisha who is still trying to find support for his political abuse of Albania's integration processes.

### **WHY IS FATOS NANO IMPORTANT FOR THE LEFT-WING?**

Former prime minister and former leader of the Socialist Party Fatos Nano is one of the key actors in Albanian political pluralism. Although he might seem unconcerned, he is closely following political developments and during the election campaign he very carefully and diplomatically expressed dissatisfaction with the current role of the Socialist Party's leaders, showing open support to his former political opponent Ilir Meta (LSI) and to non-conformist Petro Koci. Rama's attempt to eliminate Fatos Nano not only from the list of candidates but also from the political arena has damaged badly the reputation of the Socialist Party which is obviously experiencing a leadership crisis. Edi Rama has contributed to this crisis by openly confronting once most reputable members of the Socialist Party, such as Fatos Nano, Ilir Meta, Petro Koci, Brokajt Sabit, Ylli Bufi, Servet Pellumbi and others who symbolised or still symbolise the Socialist Party.

The IFIMES International Institute is of the opinion that regardless of the results of the parliamentary elections in Albania it will be interesting to observe the denouement of the situation in the Albanian political left-wing where Fatos Nano might play a decisive role in the upcoming events.

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